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## What Effects on Farm Families When Husbands or Wives Take Jobs in Town?

Ward W. Bauder  
*Iowa State University*

Donald L. Kaldor  
*Iowa State University*

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"Average income per farm remained about the same."

"Realized net farm income is likely to be lower this year."

"Per capita personal income of the farm population may match the record high of 1963."

"Net cash income was over \$8,000 for large farms."

"The company's escalator clause will compensate for changes in real income."

"Out of discretionary income, the family provides for insurance . . ."

Total farm income is divided by the number of farming units,

Production expenses are deducted from gross farm income to get realized net.

All income from nonfarm sources is added to the net farm income. This amount is divided among the total farm population.

This differs from net farm income in that nonmoney income is not included. "Net cash" and "net money" income are the same.

Real income is often used in three different ways:

- (a) In an economic sense, it's income measured in goods and services with allowance made for changes in the value of money (sometimes called "real wages".)
- (b) From a consumption point of view, real income includes both money and nonmoney income.
- (c) In everyday usage real income sometimes describes nonmoney kinds of income like home-produced food ("real things" for consumption).

This is what remains of family money income after deductions and provisions for essential living costs (food, shelter, clothing, transportation).

## WHAT EFFECTS ON FARM FAMILIES... WHEN HUSBANDS OR WIVES TAKE JOBS IN TOWN?



Few families report changes in responsibility for making decisions, but there was some shifting of household and family tasks when nonfarm job was taken. Some reduction in social participation and leisure activities.

by Ward W. Bauder and Donald R. Kaldor

WHEN NEW INDUSTRY comes into a rural area, some of the new jobs may be taken by farm operators, their wives or both. This article discusses what happens within the farm family when one or both take nonfarm employment but continue to farm.

For what happens to the farm and farming operations, see "What Effects on Farms When Farm Operators Take Jobs in Town?" in the December issue of *Iowa Farm Science* or reprint FS-1068. What happens to the division of farm labor and the responsibility for decisions when the operator, his wife or both are away from the farm regularly during most of the day or for a night shift? Who gets the breakfast and gets the children ready for school if the mother has to be on the job at the factory at 7

in the morning? What happens to the family's social life?

### Some Answers . . .

A recent study of the impact of new industry on an eastern Iowa community provided some of the answers to these questions. The Clinton Engine Corporation of Clinton, Michigan, transferred part of its small engine manufacturing to Maquoketa, Iowa, in 1950. Farmers and farm wives were among those who sought and obtained jobs at the new factory. In 1957 about one of every 25 farm operators and one of every 50 farm wives in the area surrounding Maquoketa were working at the engine factory but continued their roles as farm operators or farm wives. Most of the factory jobs were full-time, but many lasted only during part of the fall, winter and spring months.

Wives who worked at the plant were asked about the effect of their nonfarm job on family life. Wives of farm operators who worked at the plant were asked about the effect of their husband's nonfarm work on family life. Husbands weren't interviewed on changes in family life. In some families, both husband and wife had factory jobs.

WARD W. BAUDER is social science analyst, Farm Population Branch, Economic Research Service, USDA. DONALD R. KALDOR is professor of agricultural economics and a staff member of the Center for Agricultural and Economic Development.

In these, it was not always possible to distinguish between the effects of the husband's and the effects of the wife's job.

## Who Makes Decisions?

Does taking a nonfarm job change the responsibility for making certain decisions in the farm family? The answer depends partly on whether husband or wife takes the nonfarm job and on which one usually made the decision in the first place.

Many believe that the husband has more authority in farm families than in other families. Whether this is generally true, we don't know. But for the decision areas we studied, this was not true.

The family decisions studied included: calling a doctor, how much to spend for food, purchase of major appliances or furniture, visiting friends or relatives, attending movies or other entertainment, spending money for children, and major punishment for children.

The most frequent pattern among families in our study was an approximately equal sharing of responsibility between husband and wife for decision-making — both for those that included one or both employed at nonfarm work and those that had no nonfarm work. The only type of decision that departed from this pattern was one dominated by the wife slightly more frequently than it was shared — the decision on how much to spend for food.

Thus, at least for the decisions we studied, we concluded that the typical pattern was one that could be described as equalitarian.

Only 8 percent of families reported changes because of nonfarm work in who made decisions. For those who made changes, the effect of the nonfarm work was to increase the responsibility of the husband or wife with the factory job. Usually there was a reciprocal decrease in the responsibility of the other spouse or a reduction in frequency of joint responsibility. The effect was greatest for the wife. That is, if the wife had a factory job, the likelihood that her responsibility would be increased was greater than if the husband had a factory job — and, if both had jobs,

her responsibility was more likely to be increased than his.

Another effect of nonfarm employment was to increase the frequency with which only one person did the decision-making. The number of instances increased in which one or the other made the decision alone without any help from the other. Joint decision-making was more typical of families where neither husband or wife had nonfarm employment.

When farm families with factory jobs were compared with full-time farm families, not all the differences were explained by the changes made because of the nonfarm jobs. This suggests that families who took factory jobs were originally somewhat different from other farm families. The main difference was that wives in families with factory jobs had more responsibility for decision-making. This tended to be true whether it was a family in which the wife took factory work or a family in which the husband took factory work.

This finding is related to another finding: Families who took nonfarm jobs averaged younger than families who didn't. That is, the husbands and wives who took nonfarm jobs were younger and were more likely to have young children. Evidence from this study and from others indicate a general trend toward greater participation of wives in family decision-making, particularly among the younger families.

## Task Changes . . .

The distinction between making decisions and performing tasks is arbitrary and was made in this study to facilitate analysis and does not imply a denial that often the two are so closely related as to be almost inseparable parts of the



same act. In general, however, the tasks we studied were routine tasks that involved few major decisions in their performance.

Altogether, information was obtained for 21 separate tasks which could be classified as follows: six general household or housekeeping tasks, seven child care or child control tasks, four financial tasks and four farm work tasks. Families without children in the home could not respond to questions about child care and control tasks.

Nonfarm employment caused more changes in who performed family tasks than in who made certain decisions. Still, the number of changes made was a small minority of those that were possible. Non-farm employment of the wife caused more change than nonfarm employment of the husband. Farm wives normally, however, shoulder the major burden of responsibility for family tasks at home while the husband is busy in the field.

Employment of the husband alone at a factory job most frequently caused changes in such tasks as: field work (7 percent), chores other than care of chickens (16 percent), care of the yard and lawn (5 percent) and seeing that the children go to bed (6½ percent). It caused no change, whatsoever, in nine of the 21 tasks. These nine tasks were: doing the washing, seeing that children wear the right clothing, getting children ready and off to school, reading to the children, settling children's arguments, taking care of the chickens, gardening, keeping records, and planning the family savings.

In contrast, employment of the wife caused some change in 19 of the 21 tasks. Only shopping for groceries and keeping records were unaffected. Proportion of families reporting change varied from 3 to 39 percent for different tasks. The



tasks most frequently affected were those that normally are almost exclusively performed by the wife, such as getting breakfast (39 percent), getting children ready and off to school (30 percent) and doing dishes (19 percent).

In general, the changes in task performance caused by nonfarm work consisted of a transfer of responsibility from the spouse working at the factory to the other spouse or to someone else. In cases where the wife had the factory work and the husband continued as a full-time farmer, most of the transfer was to the children or a person other than the husband. In some cases, the task simply wasn't performed.

The effect of nonfarm employment of both husband and wife was, as would be expected, more like the effect of employment of the wife only than the effect of employment of the husband only. This would follow from the fact that most of the tasks studied were normally the wife's responsibility.

As with decision-making, the changes made in family task responsibility because of the job didn't explain all the differences between families with factory jobs and families without factory jobs. The remaining differences were most marked in the case of three financial tasks and two tasks concerning the welfare of families or the children. Very few changes because of nonfarm employment of the husband, wife or both were made in financial tasks. Yet comparison between employment groups in task responsibility show wives assuming significantly more responsibility for these tasks in families with either or both spouse employed at factory jobs than in full-time farm families.

Thus we conclude that farm families in which the wife takes more than the usual amount of responsibility for financial matters, such as keeping records, paying bills, and planning savings, are more likely to be among those seeking nonfarm employment. These tasks normally are husband dominated, thus adding further evidence that such families are more equalitarian in family organization than typical farm families.

Similar unexplained differences

were observed in the case of two child care tasks: taking children to the doctor or dentist and settling children's arguments. These tasks are normally shared by husband and wife in the full-time farm families. Even though a very small proportion of families with husband or wife or both employed at factory jobs reported changes in who took the children to the doctor or dentist, the performance of this task by the wives in such families was substantially higher than in full-time farm families. Similarly, no families with husband employed at the factory reported changes in who settles arguments among the children, but wives in these families performed this task far more frequently than wives in full-time farm families.

### **Social Participation . . .**

Most families take part in at least some social activities involving persons outside the family. How does a factory job affect these activities? Most of the families we studied said it had no effect. Only 13 percent reported change. Employment of both husband and wife or employment of the wife only was more likely to cause change than employment of the husband only.

Reported changes in membership and activities in formal groups were fairly evenly divided between increases and decreases, with increases running ahead of decreases at approximately 5 to 4. Among families reporting an increase in participation, about 60 percent said that they had joined new organizations. Forty percent said that they had attended more meetings of those organizations to which they already belonged. The principal organization joined was the labor union. Among those decreasing participation, half dropped memberships, and half attended fewer meetings.

When asked what aspects of their nonfarm work caused the change in formal social participation, most of the respondents who had decreased their membership said it was a lack of time to attend meetings or the fact that they worked the night shift and therefore couldn't attend meetings. Those who reported increases gave

joining the union as their reason.

Nonfarm employment caused about 12 percent of the families with factory jobs to reduce the number of families visited regularly and nearly half (46 percent) to reduce the frequency of visits. On the other hand, it caused 7 percent to increase the number of families visited and 1 percent to increase the frequency of visits.

Thus the over-all effect of factory jobs was to reduce visiting. This effect was greatest among families with only husband or wife employed. In such families, decreases outnumbered increases. Among families with *both* husband and wife employed, decreases and increases were about even. Less time, working the evening shift and moving away from friends caused the decreases, and meeting new people on the job caused the increases.

### **Spare Time Activities . . .**

The increase in time spent at work as a result of nonfarm employment and the more rigid time schedule of nonfarm jobs were major causes of changes in spare time activities. More than one-third (36 percent) of the farm families with nonfarm employment reported changes. Most of the changes (87 percent) were decreases in activities because one or both spouses were not home as much because of the job, because they worked on a shift that kept them occupied at times when they had participated in their usual leisure time activities or because they were too tired after work to do anything but rest. On the other hand, 13 percent reported an increase in leisure time activities after taking nonfarm employment.

Comparison of families with factory work and families without factory work indicated that only part of the differences could be explained by the effects of the factory job. The principal unexplained difference was that families with only one spouse employed at a factory job did more visiting than either families with both spouses employed or families with neither spouse employed. Since the effect of the job was to decrease the amount of visiting, this suggests that these families were more active originally.